



Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department  
Austin Child Care Council



## **A Comprehensive Early Care and Education System**

**Prepared for the Austin Child Care Council by  
The Policy Development and Research Committee**

**December 2001**

**(Updated, June 2002)**

**The Policy Development and Research Committee gratefully acknowledges the work of many individuals and community organizations that gathered on January 29, 2001 and April 7, 2001, as well as other community leaders and Child Care Council member that have reviewed the document over the last year. The purpose of the meetings was to identify core values/assumptions and core elements of an Early Care and Education system in Austin. We envision this conceptual framework as the starting point for involving other community groups, schools, agencies, and businesses in this dialogue.**

**Policy Development and Research Committee Members:**

**Dr. Joan Burnham, Chair  
Dr. Timy Baranoff  
Mary Ellen Galvan  
Sue Carpenter  
Dan Garcia  
Kyle Holder  
Dr. Aletha Huston  
Dr. Avis Wallace**

*City of Austin – HHS - Early Childhood Services*

---

P. O. Box 1088  
Austin, TX 78767  
(512) 972-5028  
e-mail: Ron.Hubbard@ci.austin.tx.us  
Ron Hubbard, Early Childhood Coordinator

## Table of Contents

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| <b>Executive Overview</b>   | 4 - 6 |
| <b>Comparison of Early Care and Education System with CAN and Austin Equity Commission Recommendations</b>        | 7-10  |
| <b>Position Statement: Issue of Quality Early Care and Education :<br/>A Call for Excellence in Austin, Texas</b> | 11-13 |
| <b>An Early Care and Education System (Detailed description)</b>  | 14-23 |

## Executive Overview

### ***Background.***

There has been much discussion in our city about the lack of access and affordability of quality child care for a large number of our families, as well as the crisis in recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified staff. An overriding question that confronts us as a part of that important dialogue is, **“What would an ideal Early Care and Education system look like, should we be successful in securing dollars to fund it in Austin?”**

In an effort to address this question, the Research and Policy Development Committee of the City of Austin Child Care Council (see attachment) has developed a framework for examining such a system. That framework includes core values (assumptions) in which an early care and education system would exist, expected outcomes if a comprehensive system were in place, and six critical components of a system:

- 1) ***Early Care and Education***
- 2) ***planning, evaluation, and coordination***
- 3) ***family supports***
- 4) ***program supports***
- 5) ***advocacy***
- 6) ***health and wellness promotion***

In preparing this document over an 18 month timeframe, that Committee actively engaged in researching exemplary, comprehensive Early Care and Education systems throughout the country and overseas, including identifying and synthesizing quality initiatives in other parts of the U.S. at both the local and state levels. After summarizing models from cities and other states, committee members identified key elements and grouped them by their commonalities. The final draft was presented and approved in concept by the Child Care Council at its November 2000 meeting, with the requested recommendation that the City of Austin Office of Early Childhood and the Child Care Council take the next important step - reviewing the draft and getting input from the larger Austin community. After approval of the Child Care Council, the Research and Policy Committee conducted two major focus groups of community leaders in both January and April 2001 to get input on the draft Early Care and Education system. The document reflects their suggestions and those of other individuals who have reviewed the work and provided valuable feedback.

### ***Context for the work.***

The work of the Research and Policy Committee has not been done in a vacuum, since the crisis in Early Care and Education has been the agenda of both the city and the private sector in recent months. Moreover, many public entities, the private sector, and non-profit organizations within Austin have been working on aspects of the overall problem, and the issue is being addressed by several major policy groups. Many of our recommendations for an ideal early education and system have been made by policy-making groups that have researched the problem, undertaken community assessments, and made recommendations, including the Community Action Network (identified in its Critical Issues Report) and the Austin Equity Commission,

In an effort to show some of the parallels, we have attached a matrix document prepared by the Research and Policy Committee which identifies the commonalities among the Equity

Commission recommendations, the C.A.N. recommendations, and this Child Care Council framework. All of recommendations of the three groups included in the matrix incorporated considerable input from the community in both the drafting and finalization stages.

***Overall snapshot for affordable child care in Travis County.***

The demand for affordable, licensed child care in Austin and Travis County has exceeded availability for quite some time. High quality infant and toddler care programs often have a waiting list of two years and represent the most serious shortage in available early childhood programming. Additionally, with many manufacturing companies having 12-hour shifts, the need for child care during evening hours is very limited through current providers. In Travis County, there is a waiting list of children who are eligible (by family income level) for subsidized child care voucher slots through the Child Care Solutions program (formerly called the Child Care Management System). The cost of child care has increased about 50% in the last five years in Travis County, making it unaffordable for many low and middle income families.

As a result of the economic boom in Austin in the last decade, housing and child care expenses have increasingly driven up the local cost of living. Due to the high cost of living in the areas, too many of the area wage earners can be classified as “working poor” because their wages are insufficient to cover the basic costs associated with housing, child care, food, transportation, and health care. For instance, even more than a decade ago in 1990 a family with an income of \$62,500 generally used about 7% of their income for child care, while a family making only \$15,000 spent more than 25% of their income on child care. More recent calculations (2001) by the Center for Public Policy Priorities, using both the Family Security Index and the Family Security Portfolio, indicate an even higher cost of child care. While there is some evidence with the downturn in the economy that some necessary expenditures (e.g., clothing and housing) will be less, to date there is no indication that child care costs will decrease, since costs of running programs understandably remain high. Moreover, with many low and middle income families suffering directly from the impact of the recession, their available dollars are fewer for all expenditures, including child care. Costs for other necessities (e.g., transportation, medical, etc.) are anticipated to remain high as well.

***Next steps.***

***The Research and Policy Committee will engage in the following next steps:***

1. *Work with other entities to inventory all early childhood initiatives, including formal programming and parenting programs.*
2. *Present the Early Care and Education framework to various community and leadership groups in Austin, getting their suggestions for moving forward.*
3. *Collaborate with public agencies, community organizations, and the private sector to address these agreed upon priority areas in an Early Care and Education system.*

***Further information.***

If you would like further information (including assistance in presenting this document to groups) please call Joan Burnham, Chair of the CCC Research and Policy Committee (454-9812) or Ron Hubbard, Coordinator, Early Childhood Services, City of Austin (972-5028).

**Comparison of Early Care and Education System with Recommendations by Community Action Network (outlined in the urgent issues report) and the Austin Equity Commission \***

\*It does not include areas addressed by only one of the three groups. have been omitted from this comparison chart. Components included under each of the three groups are numbered the way they are listed in their original documents and thus may not appear sequential in the usual sense.

| Early Care and Education System – Austin Child Care Council   | Community Action Network   | Austin Equity Commission   |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>I. EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM.</b><br/> <i>This component is the central core of the systems, through which formal and informal care of young children are addressed.</i></p> <p><b>1a. Quality of Early Childhood Programs:</b><br/> <i>-Trained and qualified staffs are fairly compensated, which reduces turnover, increases stability, and ultimately increases the supply of qualified staff. Fewer early childhood programs will close their doors.</i><br/>           -The field of Early Care and Education is a respected profession with career tracks, appropriate pay, and stable, reasonable working conditions.</p> | <p>1. Increase the number of new qualified early childhood teachers and keep current qualified teachers.</p> | <p>2. Austin should improve the quality of early childhood programs that provide full- time care to the children of low-income working parents.</p> <p>5. Austin should improve the recruitment, development, and retention of professional child care staff. Includes recommendations for training programs and collaborations.</p>   |
| <p><b>1b. Affordability of Early Childhood Programs</b></p> <p>-Parents pay fees based on their income.</p> <p>-Subsidies and child care assistance are sufficient to allow parents choice of care.</p>   | <p>4. Reduce cost of good quality child care to parents.</p>   | <p>3 Austin should improve the affordability, availability, and accessibility of child care in family facilities and center settings.</p> <p>- increase the number of child care spaces and scholarships for low-income children by 10 percent of the current service level every year for five years so that low-income families do not have to pay more than 10 percent of their income for child care.</p>  |
| <p><b>1c. Availability of Early Childhood Programs</b></p> <p>-Quality early childhood programs are available.</p> <p>-Both education about parenting and how to choose care are available.</p> <p>-Early Care and Education are available for teen parents, children with special needs, children who are sick, and for children during family emergencies.</p> <p>-There is a fully developed infrastructure so that early education providers are well equipped, adequately staffed, and convenient for all families</p>   | <p>4. Reduce cost of good quality child care to parents.</p>   | <p>3 Austin should improve the affordability, availability, and accessibility of child care in family facilities and center settings.</p> <p>7. The City of Austin should partner with the school district to reduce teen pregnancies and provide child care facilities for student parents.</p> <p>4. support the child care resource and referral agency in providing the information working parents need, including information about high-quality care, child care for children with special needs, sick care, emergency care, and respite care</p> |

| Early Care and Education System – Austin Child Care Council  | Community Action Network   | Austin Equity Commission   |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>III. FAMILY SUPPORTS.</b><br/> <b>This component consists of an array of coordinated services available to all families that will ensure optimal development of their children from birth through the early years.</b></p> <p>1. Parent Preparation.<br/> Individuals have access to important information that will prepare them for parenthood.</p> <p>6. Identification /Referral/Linkages</p> <hr/> <p><b>IV. PROGRAM SUPPORTS</b><br/> This component addresses programs that must be part of the overall infrastructure.</p> <p>1. Regulations / Licensing/Accreditation</p> <p>2. Professional Development Supports<br/> -A clearly defined career ladder is in place for individuals pursuing careers in Early Care and Education.<br/> -Mechanisms to ensure professional and work force development include training, higher education classes, staff and leadership development, and recognition of a valued work force.<br/> -Higher education systems, including community college and four-year institutions, are available throughout the metropolitan area<br/> -Quality supports are in place to provide technical assistance to early childhood programs</p> | <p>3. Support parents<br/> Centralized coordinated efforts for parent supports</p> <p>Increase available parent education.</p> <hr/> <p>2, Support providers to increase the quality of child care</p> | <p><b>4. Increase the number of parents who have access to adequate child care, child development information, and early childhood services.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- coordinate parent support activities among existing providers</li> <li>- increase the availability of parent education, improve access by reducing barriers such as lack of child care and transportation, and offer incentives for parents to attend</li> <li>-support the child care resource and referral agency in providing the information working parents need.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>5. Improve the recruitment, development, and retention of professional child care staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expand and strengthen an early childhood career pathway through Austin Community College and with key business partners.</li> <li>- increase the number of accredited early childhood education programs and registered family homes by providing technical support to those programs working toward national and state accreditation.</li> </ul> |

| Early Care and Education System – Austin Child Care Council  | Community Action Network  | Austin Equity Commission |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| <p><b>V. ADVOCACY</b><br/> <b>This component consists of a joint effort by local and state organizations to advocate for young children's needs by increasing awareness and sponsoring legislation, which increases the quality and coordination of services to young children.</b></p> <p>1. Public Engagement and Awareness<br/> 2. Lobbying for Children<br/> 3. Development of Broad-Based Support for Children and Their Families</p> | <p>5. Increase public awareness of the importance of early childhood development, parenting skills, and qualified early childhood teachers.</p> |                          |

*(Position Statement: Issue of Quality of Child Care  
Approved: May 2002, Austin Child Care Council)*

**Quality Early Care and Education:  
A Call for Excellence in Austin, Texas**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines a high-quality early childhood program as one that “provides a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families.”

Over several decades, multiple studies have demonstrated that high-quality early childhood programs produce dramatic short and long-term benefits for children’s cognitive and social development. Unfortunately, several large studies have also indicated that only a small percentage of early childhood programs meet high-quality standards. In fact, most existing programs throughout the United States, including those in Austin, are unable to support the optimal development of children.

In 2001, the Austin Child Care Council adopted “A Comprehensive Early Childhood Education and Care System”, a document prepared by the Council’s Research and Policy Committee. This document outlines a vision for a coordinated support system for all of Austin’s children and families. One of the underpinning principles in this vision is a commitment to upholding high standards for the education and care of our community’s youngest citizens.

Quality education and care can be measured along a continuum. All early childhood programs have strengths and weaknesses, and every program can continuously improve. The *minimum* standard for care in our community is monitored by the child care licensing department of the State of Texas (Child and Protective Regulatory Services). All early childhood programs are required to *at least* meet these very basic health and safety licensing standards. Licensing standards assure merely an acceptable level of safe and healthy care, but they do not address the quality of experiences the child has during the day.

Some early childhood programs elect to demonstrate and document higher levels of quality care by participating in the Texas Rising Star program administered by Work Source -Child Care Solutions, or by seeking national accreditation through NAEYC. Work Source -Child Care Solutions provides child care subsidies to parents based upon their income. Participating early childhood programs are monitored by Child Care Solutions specialists who regularly assess the programs using quality checklists. Programs are designated in one of four categories – provisional, 2 stars, 3 stars, or 4 stars –based on the number of standards they meet. The Rising Star standards address program structural issues, such as staff training, group size, and director qualifications, as well as process issues, such as the quality of interactions with the children and the strength of the curriculum.

Early childhood programs may also elect to seek voluntary national accreditation through recognized systems administered by NAEYC, the National Assn. For Family Child Care (NAFCC), or the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA). These accreditation systems are rigorously reviewed and accepted by early childhood professionals throughout the United States, and involve a lengthy process of self-study, documentation, validation by independent professionals, and national commission decision. Accreditation is awarded for a period of three years. In Texas, only 7% of eligible programs have received accreditation through NAEYC, a dismal level that puts our state near the bottom nationally.

Research indicates that programs are most likely to achieve the highest levels of quality care when the following critical predictors exist:

- Adult-child ratios are low.
- Group size for different age levels is consistent with NAEYC accreditation standards.
- Staff members have high levels of formal education (college).
- Staff members have specialized training in child development.
- Teacher wages are higher.
- Teacher turnover rates are low.

These features of child care are associated with the healthy and stimulating experiences for children that constitute high quality care:

- A safe and clean physical environment
- Caregivers who are attentive, positive, and responsive in interactions with children
- Well-planned and developmentally appropriate curriculum
- Rich opportunities for language learning—both speaking and comprehending
- Parent involvement and communication with caregivers

Quality Early Care and Education is the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in our community. Collaborative, coordinated community efforts to measurably impact the five critical predictors of quality may be the best way to improve Early Care and Education in Austin.

Sources:

“A Call for Excellence in Early Childhood Education” NAEYC (2002),  
[http://www.naeyc.org/children's\\_champions](http://www.naeyc.org/children's_champions)

Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team (1999), *The Children of the Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study Go To School*, Executive Summary; Frank Porter Graham and National Center for Early Development and Learning at UNC-Chapel Hill. [www.fpg.unc.edu](http://www.fpg.unc.edu)

*Quality in Child Care Centers* (1997), National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education. [www.inpin.org/library/1998](http://www.inpin.org/library/1998)

Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Study (1995). Public Report. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Denver, CO: Economics Department, University of Colorado at Denver.

Vandell, Deborah Lowe and Wolfe, Barbara. *Child Care Quality: Does It Matter and Does It Need To Be Improved?* (2000). <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality00/ccqual.htm>

## AN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM

*What would an ideal system look like, and what structures would be in place to support it?*

### CORE VALUES/ASSUMPTIONS

*Core Values or Assumptions comprise the moral framework and parameters in which the various components are integrated into a comprehensive child care system.*

#### **1. Importance of Brain Research Concerning Years 0-5**

Parents and caregivers are knowledgeable about the brain development research and its implications for quality early childhood education for ages 0-5.

#### **2. Adequate funding**

Adequate funding is key to the success of a comprehensive Early Care and Education system, including sufficient dollars for the following: 1) child care financial subsidies for low income families; 2) adequate compensation and benefits for early childhood education staff; 3) recruitment, retention, ongoing professional development and promotion of staff; 4) technical assistance for both providers and staff; and 5) quality child care facilities, with developmentally appropriate equipment, materials, and resources.

#### **3. Cultural Competencies**

Early childhood education centers and home providers recognize, understand, and provide support for children from diverse cultural backgrounds and integrate that knowledge into delivery of programs.

#### **4. Strength/Asset-based Services**

Services for children and families build on their strengths and assets, rather than focus on risk factors, which has too often been the case.

#### **5. Grassroots Involvement**

Parents and other caregivers are actively involved in having a say as to the kind of early childhood education programs they need and want for their children and are actively engaged in advocating for quality care.

#### **6. One Stop for Services**

One-stop services co-locate and integrate wraparound services for all children and families that need them, making it possible for families to more easily access and receive the support and services components of a Comprehensive Early Care and Education System.

#### **7. Public Awareness**

There is widespread public awareness about the gap between what most parents can afford to pay for quality Early Care and Education and what quality really costs.

#### **8. Governmental Infrastructure**

There exist policies, procedures, and an infrastructure at the local, state, and federal levels to support families and care givers in ensuring quality Early Care and Education for all children.

## **I. EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION**

*This component is the central core of the system, through which the formal and informal care of young children are addressed.*

### **1. Early Childhood Programs**

#### **a. Quality of Early Childhood Programs**

- Trained and qualified staffs are fairly compensated, which reduces turnover, increases stability, and ultimately increases the supply of qualified staff. Fewer early childhood programs will close their doors.
- Programs extend links to the home and the schools, which will help to identify children with special needs and improve family-provider communication.
- Programs meet quality criteria, including accreditation standards.

#### **b. Affordability of Early Childhood Programs**

- Parents pay fees based on their income.
- Subsidies and child care assistance are sufficient to allow parents choice of care.

#### **c. Availability of Early Childhood Programs**

- Quality early childhood programs are available. Both education about parenting and about how to choose care are available.
- Early Care and Education are available for teen parents, children with special needs, children who are sick, and for children during family emergencies.
- There is a fully developed infrastructure so that early education providers are well equipped, adequately staffed, and convenient for all families.

### **2. Children not Cared for Routinely Outside the Home**

- Early intervention is available for all children identified with special needs (primarily through home visitations).
- Early literacy programs exist for all children.
- Parents are educated about developmentally appropriate guidelines for each age group.
- Parents are both educated and knowledgeable about positive parenting practices.

### 3. Improved Outcomes for Children

- Children are ready for school success, ultimately increasing high school graduation, post-secondary program completion (including college), and lifetime earnings.
- Early intervention exists for children with special needs, preventing additional delays and greater problems at a later date.
- Children gain assets they need to be healthy, productive adults, which has been substantiated in the long term to reduce the student dropout rate, juvenile delinquency and crime, and teenage pregnancies.
- Parents are able to work and feel secure that their children are receiving quality care.
- Productivity at work and parenting effectiveness are increased.
- The field of Early Care and Education is a respected profession with career tracks, appropriate pay, and stable, reasonable working conditions, (which ultimately should translate in better quality child care).
- Positive, overall net gains occur: The dollar amount gained is ultimately more than the dollar amount spent.

## **II. PLANNING, EVALUATION, AND COORDINATION**

*This component is the essential planning, coordination, and evaluation processes for ensuring that a system is carefully developed, administered, and examined to determine its effectiveness in improving the lives of children and their families.*

### **1. Ongoing Program Evaluation**

Program evaluation assesses how well programs are meeting goals for quality of care, accreditation, staff development, adequate compensation structure, and other objectives.

### **2. Needs Identification**

Needs identification determines what staff, facilities, and resources are needed to serve the community.

### **3. Data Collection and Dissemination**

Information about supply, quality, staffing, and costs of early childhood programs (including home-based care) is collected systematically. Meaningful, well-defined child outcomes are assessed.

### **4. Planning**

The planning process estimates future needs and the demand for early childhood programs, laying out the resources and actions to be taken to meet those needs.

### **5. Coordination**

Coordination occurs through gathering and providing information to local and state agencies and early childhood program entities, enabling them to fill gaps in services without duplication.

### **6. Monitoring/Program Oversight**

Monitoring and providing oversight by qualified individuals includes the maintenance of up-to-date information about program accreditation, licensing, and conformity to state and local requirements.

### **7. Technical Assistance**

Technical assistance provides early childhood program providers with training and information about: 1) setting up new programs; 2) establishing goals; 3) assessing needs; 4) evaluating progress; 5) using sound management practices; 6) hiring, evaluating and retaining qualified staff; 7) obtaining funding from public and private sources; 8) becoming registered (home-based providers) or accredited (centers); 9) other needs identified by providers as critical to their success.

### **8. Cost/Benefit Analysis**

Costs of early childhood education programs are examined in relationship to short-term and long-term benefits to society (improved worker productivity; reduced costs of special education; effects on children's later achievement; less involvement in the criminal justice system; higher earnings).

### **III. FAMILY SUPPORTS**

***This component consists of an array of coordinated services available to all families that will ensure optimal development of their children from birth through the early years.***

#### **1. Parent Preparation**

Individuals have access to important information that will prepare them for parenthood. This information is presented in courses in elementary, middle and high schools, and in the community at-large, including community agencies. Professionals, staffs, and agencies that provide information have diversity training.

#### **2. Parent Education**

All parents have access to information that will help them to parent their children in a way that facilitates optimal development. Technology training and use are available to parents.

#### **3. Home Visiting**

Home visiting is readily available. It provides for home-based instruction and intervention by trained staff to help parents improve parenting skills to both optimize development and form healthy relationships with their children. Coordinated services are offered without income or geographic location restrictions.

#### **4. Respite Care**

Families, especially those with special needs, are provided with opportunities to have their children cared for by other knowledgeable individuals/families so they can have time off from the demands of parenting. Training is available for respite care providers. Sources for respite care are made known to parents and professionals.

#### **5. Emergency and Crisis Support**

Families and their children have access to money, food, housing, etc. to help them weather emergency situations. A crisis support team is available to help children and their families through crises that the family experiences.

#### **6. Identification/Referral/Linkages**

In order for parents to support and provide for their children's basic needs, parents themselves must have access to adult education and literacy classes, technology training, career development assistance and training, and mental health/substance abuse treatment. Services are readily available at facilities frequented by families such as churches, schools, public libraries, and clinics.

#### **7. Family Resource Centers**

Walk-in and stigma-free, easily accessible Family Resource Centers provide a safe haven for families and also offer an array of family support programs (e.g., computer skills, ESL, citizenship, parenting classes, and after-school programming) that promote parent leadership development and self-sufficiency. Extended hours are in place.

#### **8. Wraparound Services**

Wraparound services are essential to providing the support services that many families need, in addition to affordable, quality care (e.g., transportation, employment, health care/medical insurance, housing, and social services).

## **IV. PROGRAM SUPPORTS**

***This component addresses programs that must be a part of the overall infrastructure if an Early Care and Education system is to succeed, with a focus on supporting all child care centers at their respective levels to bring all of them up to higher standards, regardless of their initial starting points.***

### **1. Regulations/Licensing/Accreditation**

- Regulations provide parameters under which child care and home day providers can operate.
- Licensing refers to the legal approval to provide services in either a home or center. It ensures that minimally acceptable standards for care are met (e.g., adult to child ratio, equipment, and caregiver educational pre-requisites).

### **2. Quality Standards**

Accreditation of child care refers to a higher level of standards than is required for licensing. Such standards include:

- Texas Rising Stars recognition of different quality levels for designated vendor status for both child care and day home providers who meet and/or exceed quality standards. Child care costs are reimbursed through the voucher system through the Worksource Child Care Solutions Program at higher rates for those programs that meet one or more of the steps in the Texas Rising Star recognition system.
- Accreditation Criteria and Procedures of The National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a division of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), applicable to early childhood programs that serve children from infants through eight year olds.
- Quality Standards for Accreditation by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), utilized by persons who offer care to children in their home.
- The Standards for Quality School-Age Care by The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA), directed towards programs for students ages 5 to 14 years old during out-of-school time.

### **3. Professional Development Supports**

- A clearly defined career ladder is in place for individuals pursuing careers in Early Care and Education. Because research clearly indicates that an educated staff is the leading indicator for high quality education and care, opportunities for individuals to begin and continue informal and formal professional development are essential.
- Mechanisms to ensure professional and work force development include training, higher education classes, staff and leadership development, and recognition of a valued work force.

- Higher education systems, including community college and four-year institutions, are available throughout the metropolitan area and courses are offered at convenient hours so that current practitioners have reasonable access to the programs. Higher education institutions have articulation agreements so individuals can move seamlessly from one program to another.
- Career counseling about the Early Care and Education profession is available at public schools, higher education institutions, government agencies, and non-profit organizations.

#### **4. Financial Supports for Early Care and Education Professionals**

Financial supports are in place to supplement low-wage salaries and benefits. Supplements are tied to tenure and professional development.

#### **5. Resource and Referral System for Consumers of Early Childhood Programs**

Essential to a working system is the listing of licensed and/or accredited programs, through public agencies (e.g., Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services), and non-profit organizations that provide valuable information on such programs in our local community (e.g., Austin Families). Information about financial assistance and the importance of quality Early Care and Education –as well as checklists for selecting quality programs –should be easily accessed and targeted to all families with young children. Consumer information should also be available through a phone number and a web site that are well publicized.

#### **6. Quality Supports to Programs**

Quality supports are in place to provide technical assistance to early childhood programs through consultant services and /or written resource materials. Individuals or programs can access free or low-cost information about new early childhood center start-ups; staff development and management; financial planning and budgeting; written policies and procedures; technology for administration and/or children’s programming; quality early childhood programming; and strategies for working with families. Mentoring opportunities are in place, both within programs and between programs.

#### **7. Workforce Supports**

Employers provide support in a variety of ways, including shared business resources, voucher programs, financial assistance to neighborhood early childhood programs; mentoring of other employers; and on-site or off-site sponsored programs. In addition to employer-supported early childhood education programs, other supports in the workplace are prevalent, including family-friendly policies for parents (e.g., flex time, time off for parent-school conferences).

## **V. ADVOCACY**

***This component consists of a joint effort by local and state organizations to advocate for young children's needs by increasing awareness and sponsoring legislation, which increases the quality and coordination of services to young children.***

### **1. Public Engagement and Awareness**

Efforts are made on behalf of children to ensure that their needs are understood and visible to individuals, parents, and communities in Austin and throughout Texas. Through this effort, the mind set and values of the general public will be enhanced to help them to understand the critical importance of Early Care and Education, including the research on brain development during the first three years of life. The broader public understands the cost of quality care and the need for families to make a livable wage to be able to pay for quality early childhood education programs and other escalating living expenditures (e.g., housing in Austin).

### **2. Lobbying for Children**

Groups will work together across the state and locally to inform elected officials of the needs of young children. Legislation is sponsored and supported by these groups.

### **3. Development of Broad-Based Support for Children and Their Families**

Widespread community involvement is established through engaging chambers of commerce and making connections with lobbyists for cities, organizations, advocacy groups, and state/local associations.

## **VI. HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROMOTION**

***This component refers to a comprehensive system in place that focuses on acute care, mental health support, and prevention of future health problems through health promotion strategies.***

### **1. Dental and Health Care, Medical Insurance, and a Primary Care Provider**

A continuum of care is in place, which promotes healthy life styles to prevent chronic illnesses and disabilities, access to primary health care (well baby check-ups/annual physicals), dental care, treatment, and emergency care. All children have medical insurance (private insurance, Medicaid, CHIP, Medical Assistance Program card, etc.) with a primary care provider coordinating their preventative and early treatment care.

### **2. Prenatal Care and Support**

All parents have access to medical care before, during, and after pregnancy to assure full-term, healthy babies, including childbirth and child development classes.

### **3. Immunizations**

All children are immunized in all appropriate immunizations for preventable childhood diseases, administered in a time frame recommended by primary care physicians.

### **4. Early Mental Health Services**

Mental health support is available for all parents and their children, including: 1) parent training in early childhood development that stresses cognitive/social factors; 2) access to early diagnosis of behavior or developmental differences; and 3) access to mental health counseling for both parents and children.

### **5. Child Abuse Prevention**

Child abuse prevention is addressed both through parent and child care provider training in preventing abuse (e.g., incorporating strategies for managing behavior, anger control, and positive parenting).

### **6. Health Promotion**

Parent/child care provider education is available that incorporates sound practices for preventing later health problems, including understanding of good nutritional approaches; dangers of smoking, chemical abuse, and obesity; and the importance of exercise and recreation to a healthy life style.

### **7. Childhood Safety**

Parent/child care provider education is delivered and accessed widely, with a focus on prevention of accidents, addressing such topics as: bike safety/ use of helmets; street crossings; appropriate use of car seats; electricity/water safety; and other causes of unintended child injuries and fatalities.

### **8. Services for Children with Special Needs**

Education/referral for community resources for children with chronic illnesses and disabilities are readily accessible and used by parents, including early intervention services, respite care, child development, parent support/education, and available basic needs support services.

### **9. Linkages between Early Care and Education System and Health Care System**

Linkages are in place between the Early Care and Education system and the health care system, supporting transitions from the home and early childhood settings to the schools.

## Major References.

Community Action Network, **Report of the Child Care Task Force (Ambassadors for Children)**, Austin, Texas. November, 1999 (see [www.canaction.org](http://www.canaction.org))

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts, **Financing of Child Care in the United States: An Illustrative Catalog of Current Strategies**. Mitchell, Anne, Stoney, Louise, and Dichter, Harriet. 1997. (A 2001 edition is now available.)

Mitchell, Anne, and Shore, Rima, **Next Steps Toward Quality in Early Care and Education:** a report commissioned by the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, June 1999. (The ECFC is a collaborative of 20 national, regional, and local foundation representatives) Contact Margaret Petruska, The Heinz Foundation (412-281-5777).

National Center for Children in Poverty, the Harvard Family Research Project, and the Strategic Partners from the Starting Points Sites; **Starting Points: Challenging the “Quiet Crisis.”** Carnegie Foundation, 1999.

National Governors Association, **Promising Practices** (in early childhood Education), (See [www.nga.org](http://www.nga.org))